

reunite the child with family members. Reasonable efforts include relative contacts and publication of the named parent.

The TPR packet is received and reviewed by the Permanency Planning Coordinator in the State Office and then the cases are presented to the Director's Advisory Committee on Permanency Planning (DACOPP). If the TPR packet is deemed appropriate for termination, it is referred to the Attorney General's Office to obtain a court date to terminate the parent(s) rights.

MACWIS maintains the status of all children in custody of MDHS. The Eligibility Unit also reviews the records of MDHS children to check eligibility, to report changes, and to terminate custody.

To expedite adoptions, MDHS has completed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mississippi School of Law and the University of Mississippi as mentioned in the PIP. The schools are assisting MDHS to provide swift services to families wishing to adopt. The law schools have finalized about 60 adoptions.

Family Preservation is available in most counties to at-risk families where the children are not in MDHS custody. The Family Preservation Program provides transportation for families and other concrete services.

To assist children in custody, foster care maintenance payments and adoption assistance payments are generated to families who care for the agency's children. The foster parents will also be given adequate and appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the child. Ample services will be made available to protect the safety and health of the children.

The services provided through Title IV-B, Subpart 2 include Family Support, Family Preservation, Time-Limited Reunification, and Adoption Promotions. DFCS intends to distribute the allotted 20% to each of the four categories under Title IV-B, subpart 2. The remaining 20% is utilized for administration and training services.

Family Support

The term "Family Support Services" means community-based services to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families designed to increase the strength and stability of families (including adoptive, foster, and extended families), to increase parents' confidence and competence in their parenting abilities, to afford children a safe, stable, and supportive family environment, and otherwise to enhance child development. Emphasis is also placed on services that provide assistance to needy families and parents by promoting job preparation, training, work, and the establishment and maintenance of two-parent households through marriage. This service will continue to be outsourced to the Sub-grantees. Also the prevention and reduction of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and the support and promotion of healthy, family life are stressed. Below are the service categories:

Teen Issues—these services provide pregnancy prevention, teen parent education, career development, mentoring, life enrichment, peer pressure, anger management, job skills training, alcohol/drug prevention, and teen support groups.

Parenting Education— these services provide classes, seminars, structured activities that cover various topics such as: appropriate discipline, child development, health, safety, nutrition, and new born parent education.

Life Skills—these services provide everyday skills for living, time management, planning, goal setting, money management, housekeeping, medical and health information, anger management, character building, alcohol/drug prevention, conflict resolution, and depression control.

Parent Support—these services provide self-help groups, “buddy families,” parents’ aides, crisis lines, mentors, and support groups for parents with children in MDHS custody. They are offered on a regular basis, professionally directed, and open to all parents as a source of ongoing peer support and problem solving.

Children and Adolescent Programs—these services provide after-school and enrichment programs such as mentoring programs, tutorial programs, and Parents-as-Teachers Programs. Priority must be given to MDHS referrals. If conducting after-school programs, a referral system must be set up to recruit “at-risk” students.

Providing Supervised Visitation between foster children and their families—this service is provided by a counselor or person in a related field.

Providing Respite Services to support foster parents or families in crisis—these services provide relief for families and children at risk of being separated.

Fatherhood Initiative—this program provides responsible training to fathers, expectant fathers, or other appropriate family members.

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs are used primarily within the Families First Resource Centers (FFRCs) throughout the State of Mississippi. The FFRCs focus on the following services:

- Parenting Education – Each FFRC determines the parenting education they will provide to their communities.

- Healthy Marriage – *The 8 Habits of a Successful Marriage* by Franklin Covey engages marriage-strengthening program which takes a self-discovery approach empowering all couples including fragile families.
- Abstinence – The “Just Wait” abstinence program is recommended by the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) for those funded by Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Teen Pregnancy Prevention for those funded by Title IV-B.
- Fatherhood Initiative – All FFRC use the *Seven Secrets of Effective Fathers* curriculum.

The expected results/outcomes are:

- Decreased divorce rates by teaching skills training programs for married couples
- Increased marriage among couples or individuals interested in marriage
- Reduced number of entries into the welfare programs
- Reduced number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies

Family Preservation

The goal of Family Preservation is to reduce the number of children entering the foster care system by creating an environment whereby children would remain safely in their own homes.

Closely related to this, the objectives of Family Preservation are as follows:

- To provide intensive home-based services for families who have come to the attention of the Child Welfare System and who are at imminent risk of disruption due to abuse and/or neglect
- To provide follow-up services to families upon completion of these intensive home-based services

Family Preservation provides intensive home-based services for families who have come to the attention of the Child Welfare System and who are at imminent risk of disruption due to abuse and/or neglect. During the past year, these services have been closely monitored and assessed. This assessment confirmed that these services have been quite successful in maintaining children safely in their homes. From October 1, 2004, through September 30, 2005, approximately 739 families and 1,795 children were served through Family Preservation. Of the 1,795 children, 1,743 children were able to remain with their families, while 52 children had to enter the Child Welfare system. This represents a 98% success rate in keeping children safely in their own homes. While stakeholders interviewed expressed support for the effectiveness of Family Preservation services in the CFSR, they also expressed concerns that the services are not available statewide.

For the period October 1, 2005, through September 30, 2006 (these numbers actually represent data from October 2005 until August 2006 because the September 2006 numbers had not been received), approximately 142 families and 381 children were served through Family Preservation. Of the 381 children, all were able to remain with

their families; none had to enter the Child Welfare system. This represents a 100 percent success rate in keeping children safely in their own homes. While stakeholders interviewed expressed support for the effectiveness of family Preservation services in the CFSR, they also expressed concerns that the services are not available statewide.

At the end of Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2005, there were 42 of the 82 counties with available Family Preservation services. This represents approximately 52% of the counties with Family Preservation services. At the end of the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2006, there were 33 of the 82 counties with available Family Preservation services. This represents approximately 40% of the counties with Family Preservation services. This reduction in coverage is partly due to the announcement that Family Preservation Services will be outsourced. These services will be available statewide as soon as the program is outsourced. In most counties, each of the Family Preservation Program Specialists and Family Preservation Social Workers are paired with a Family Preservation Homemaker to provide more of a team approach in providing home-based family support services. In other counties, there may only be a Family Preservation Specialist or a Family Preservation Homemaker.

The Family Preservation Program support staff includes a Program Manager and a Family Preservation ASWS. These staff persons provide ongoing training and technical assistance to Family Preservation staff and other DFCS county staff. They also assist staff with assessing families for the much needed service.

The contracted agencies will be responsible for hiring the Family Preservation staff, training the staff, developing the monitoring process of the program, and conducting its evaluation. A DFCS Program Administrator will monitor the scope of services provided by the contractual agencies. The immediate goals of the program are to reduce family stress and dysfunction and to improve parenting skills. The long term objectives of the program are to reduce ongoing pathology that leads to adolescent problems (e.g. delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse) and poor adult outcomes (e.g., criminality, substance abuse, and child abuse or neglect). The program works with children ages 0-18, and involves treatment in the home with the family up to 20 hours per week to dissipate crisis and initiate skills building around family functioning.

Family Preservation has been successful in DFCS in reducing the number of children entering out-of-home placement as a result of some family crisis. Family Preservation services include the following areas:

- Workers are accessible at all times with teams of no fewer than two (2) or more than four (4) therapists.
- Do not exceed 6 cases with the average at 4-6 cases.
- Duration of service is 3-6 months.
- Inappropriate referrals include psychotic and long-term system cases.
- Draws on the causal modeling of serious antisocial behavior and sociological and family systems.

- Provides 2-15 hours per week of service to the families.
- Non-court cases and relative placement were offered services.

Family Preservation programs include the prevention of out-of-home placement of a child or children in home through behavior change. There are specific goals for each family interaction. The intervention involves a strong cognitive component which is generated into systemic skills training in family communication, parenting skills, and conflict management skills. Other areas of skills building is marital, parental depression, enactment, and problem-solving.

Time-Limited Reunification

Time-Limited Reunification services have included a collaborative partnership with the FFRCs. The goal of this partnership is to expand family support services already provided by the centers to include the additional Time-Limited Reunification services of individual, group, or family counseling; substance abuse treatment; and transportation for these services, either on-site or through contractual relationships with providers. This partnership has expanded the family support services available through the locally based resource centers.

This collaboration has been in existence since October 2002. Since this time, the agencies have reunited 172 children with their families. They have assisted with the finalization of 83 adoptions. For the upcoming funding year, the agency plans to extend the availability of Time-Limited Reunification services in these agencies. The local County Offices will be able to access these services if the families meet the requirements of Time-Limited Reunification.

In FY 2002, the agency began to integrate Time-Limited Reunification services into the Family Preservation Program. The Family Preservation Program accepts referrals on families who have been in the system for 3 months or less. They are provided intensive home-based intervention to assist in reuniting the family while insuring the children's safety. The number of reunification families served for the FFY of 2005 was 23 with 50 children who were able to remain with their families.

These two agencies have reunited 172 children with their families. They have assisted with the finalization of 83 adoptions. Although the providers are physically located in only a few counties, these services are available statewide. The local County Offices are able to access these services if the child meets the requirements of Time-Limited Reunification.

Time-Limited Reunification provides therapeutic services to children with serious emotional disorders who can remain or return home to their immediate or extended family with intensive in-home services. Case Managers are available to the child and family 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. This service is short-term, but intensive in nature. This service is also provided to children with serious emotional disorders who are in MDHS foster homes or adoptive placements prior to or after adoption finalization.

Services are provided to the entire family. Only one child shall be authorized as the primary client for payment purposes. Face-to-face contact is provided to the primary client a minimum of 2 days a week or more when necessary. The providers are licensed Child-Placing Agencies. This service is provided by Service Providers who also have a Therapeutic Foster Care Program as part of a continuum of care. Wrap-Around Services are provided to every family on a monthly basis according to a Wrap-Around Service Plan developed jointly by the family and Case Manager in order to provide support services to maintain the child in the community.

Adoption Promotion and Support Services

With the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was passed in 1997, adoption has been one of the State's priorities. ASFA addresses the need to complete TPR packets expeditiously to ensure timely and permanent placements for children in custody. The State's ability to finalize adoptions was identified as an area needing improvement during the CFSR. The weakness in this area is partially due to the lack of timely processing of TPRs. The State has implemented a TPR tracking system to enhance the process. The system in place details the status of a TPR packet from submission to the State Office from the County Office to when it is discussed in the Directors Advisory Committee on Permanency Planning to the submission of the information to the Attorney General's Office to the finalization of TPRs. The tracking system is generated weekly and updated daily.

The passage of ASFA created avenues for revenue to aid in finalizing adoptions and reduce disruption of adoptive placements. Two of these avenues are adoption incentive funds and adoption promotion funds from the Promoting Safe and Stable Families. These funds are being utilized to provide for children and families both pre and post adoption services. Services that are being rendered to both foster and adopted families include medical, counseling, appropriate clothing, tutoring, and respite care (time parents spend away from the child being cared for).

DFCS is contracting with a private provider, Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth (SCSCY), to serve foster/adopt families. The contract is for post-adoption services covering the entire State. The Partners In Permanency (PIP) Program for post adoption services was developed in 2002 to identify therapeutic services and basic family needs for the families that are adopting or have adopted. They currently work with foster families that need the following services:

- Support groups for families
- Respite care to families that need time away from the child
- Advocating services in academic settings
- Assistance with special education documents
- Mental health services (referrals)
- Medical services (referrals)
- Libraries
- Quarterly training
- Foster/adopt training

- Staff training
- Training for mental health therapists
- MAP Team referrals
- Family Retreats
- Case management

Prior to the inception of the Association of Strategic Alliance Professionals Program (ASAP) in 2002 which is now PIP, approximately 69 children were returned to MDHS custody (30% disruption rate). Disruptions have steadily declined each year; in FY2005, only 19 children were returned to MDHS (about 6% disruption rate).

Post-adoption services have helped to ensure permanency, safety, and well-being for the foster and adoptive families served. The services have helped to prevent child abuse and neglect in foster and adoptive families by providing respite care and specialized training on how to parent children who have previously been victimized. Post-adoption services are also provided to children with serious emotional disorders who are in MDHS foster homes or adoptive placements prior to or after the adoption finalization.

Plans are underway to modify the current contract with SCSCY to provide funds for other necessary services. These services include assistance with home studies and preparing TPR packets by the private agency's staff.

Three Adoption Administrators currently supervise 11 licensure specialists and 16 adoption specialists. These individuals complete all the tasks required for the Foster/Adopt Program for the State.

Additional post-adoption services will include enhanced academic services, development of more support groups, increased respite care, training to foster/adopt families of diagnoses, how to work with children with these diagnoses, adoption preparation training, secure information on other States' program, modify State's program to meet the needs of the families, and continue to work legislatively for more post-adoption services. This service is available statewide.

Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) – The State Basic Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Grant funds three (3) subgrantees to provide programs focusing on preservation services to high risk families, respite care, and supervised visitation. These subgrantees offer various programs and services to children of single parents including: resource referrals, parent education, one on one case management, home based instruction, supervised visitation, Communication of Parent Effectiveness Skills (COPEs), parent aides, teen parent support, support groups, community education, and counseling.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program – Independent Living Services are provided to foster adolescents, ages 14 to 21. Presently, there are approximately 986 teens in this age group, with 826 participating in the program. These services are

designed to help prepare teens to live on their own as they leave the custody of the state. As teens continue to enter the program, they are given an assessment to determine the youth's strengths and needs. The Independent Living Assessment/Intake Plan consists of nine components that will be necessary for teens to achieve self-sufficiency. The components are modified as needed to meet the needs of the 14 and 15 year old youths.

Services are being provided statewide and cover all of Mississippi's Congressional Districts. The state is divided into nine regions and there is an Independent Living Specialist assigned in each region. Two of the specialists are Senior Specialists. They have the responsibility of coordinating the North and the South regions. With the Chafee Independent Living Federal grant, we were able to add an Independent Living After-Care Specialist to the contract with the agency who provides our independent living services. The After-Care Specialist is responsible for completing exit interviews with youths prior to their departure from the foster care system, sending out surveys, developing/building the After-Care Program, and tracking the data collected from returned after-care surveys. The Aftercare Specialist is located in the provider's central office in Jackson.

Education and Training Vouchers – The Chafee Educational and Training Program, enacted in 2001, provides resources specifically to meet the education and training needs of youth aging out of foster care. This program makes vouchers of up to \$5,000 per year available to eligible youth attending institutions of higher education, as defined in Higher Education Act of 1965. Implementation of the Educational and Training Vouchers program will assist Mississippi in strengthening the meager financial assistance program currently in place. It will also provide the needed financial assistance to youth who grow up in foster care and reach college age without the financial resources or even the hopes of going to college. Many foster youth and former foster youth have attempted to pursue higher education on their own, but found themselves consumed with the additional financial demands of school, along with trying to meet their own basic needs.

The following individuals are considered for the ETV Program:

1. Youth currently in custody of MDHS;
2. Youth who have left custody because they attained 18 years of age, and have not yet attained 21 years of age;
3. Youth who were adopted at age 16 and have not yet attained 21 years of age;
4. Youth who graduate high school, receive a GED, or a certificate of attendance;
5. Youth must have participated in the ETV program prior to the 21st birthday in order to continue receiving ETV funds until their 23rd birthday;
6. Youth must first apply for, and have received confirmation from the institution through an award letter to include the Pell Grant, MTAG, scholarships, or other grants, if applicable.

The funds may be applied for annually during each Federal Fiscal Year (October 1-September 30). The limited amount of \$5,000, per youth, must be utilized during the fiscal year. The application should be made using the following criteria:

1. Enrolled in an institution of higher education, as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965;
2. In good standing with the college, university or vocational training school;
3. Maintaining a grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. If grade point average is below a 2.0, the youth has one semester to reestablish a 2.0 grade point average;
4. Making progress towards completing the programs they are enrolled in;
5. Priority will be given to full time students in the event of ETV funding being depleted, per federal fiscal year.

Title IV-E – The DFCS Eligibility Unit provides initial and ongoing eligibility determination and authorization of Foster Care board payments and Medicaid for more than 3,200 children in MDHS custody. The primary function is to maximize the Title IV-E funding to support Foster Care and Adoption Assistance placements. This effort reduces the utilization of capped federal and state funds.

Program Performance Indicators and Measures - Program Data Collected in Accordance with the Mississippi Performance Budget and Strategic Planning Act of 1994 (To Accompany Form MBR-1-03).

Program Outcomes: (This is the measure of the quality or effectiveness of the services provided by this program. This measure provides an assessment of the actual impact of public benefit of your agency's actions. This is the result produced, i.e., increased customer satisfaction by x% within a 12-month period, reduce the number of traffic fatalities due to drunk drivers within a 12-month period.)

<u>Targeted Program Outcomes</u>	<u>Actual Program Outcomes</u>
FY 2005	
1. Decrease the Number of Children Entering Custody	2,043
2. Increase the Number of Children Leaving Custody	1,852
3. Increase the Number of Licensed Foster Homes	1,075
FY 2006	
1. Decrease the Number of Children Entering Custody	1,982
2. Increase the Number of Children Leaving Custody	1,908
3. Increase the Number of Licensed Foster Homes	1,125
FY 2007	
1. Decrease the Number of Children Entering Custody	1,923
2. Increase the Number of Children Leaving Custody	1,965
3. Increase the Number of Licensed Foster Homes	1,175

Collaboration

There is a continued coordination and collaboration with the child and family service

delivery system throughout the State. DFCS is succeeding in its efforts to provide statewide services throughout the communities of Mississippi. There has also been positive association with the Mississippi Band of Choctaws. We continue to extend an invitation to have two representatives from the Band of Choctaw Indians serving on the Strategies for Accessing Independent Living Skills (S.A.I.L.S.) Advisory Committee. Two Native Americans attended the S.A.I.L.S. meetings and participated in the November Resource Technical Assistance.

Mississippi considers collaboration with the Mississippi Band of Choctaws to be extremely important. Collaboration between MDHS and the Mississippi Band of Choctaws Social Services will be initiated on the local and regional levels, rather than from the state level. Contact with the appropriate tribes for the two regions and the counties that are contiguous to tribal lands will be initiated by the Regional Directors for Region 3 and Region 4. The contiguous counties to the tribal lands that will be involved in the collaborative efforts are Neshoba, Leake, Kemper, Winston, and Newton.

It is anticipated that the collaborative efforts between MDHS and the Mississippi Band of Choctaws' Social Services will culminate with an interagency agreement. The primary purpose of this interagency agreement with the tribe will be to outline and specify jurisdictional questions and issues. In addition to addressing issues of jurisdiction in the interagency agreement, it is anticipated that opening new and improving on existing lines of communication will be addressed, as well as tribal involvement in other areas of child welfare, such as Independent Living. Once the interagency agreement is completed, the meetings to discuss the ongoing relationship on an on-going basis will occur at a minimum of twice a year.

The Training Program will maintain an ongoing plan to include the invitation for the MS Band of Choctaw Indians to participate in all training sponsored by the DFCS Training Program. This training will include the Intensive Training for Family Protection Specialists/Workers, Training on PIP Components, as well as any specialized training that may be requested from either entity.

Program Support

Training and Staff Development – The DFCS Training Program is under the supervision of the Division Director. During 2005, the Training Program experienced a number of changes. The training program will continue to address the needs of staff training and development by pooling various division resources.

The DFCS Training Program currently provides Intensive Training for all new DFCS Family Protection Specialists/Workers. The Intensive Training curriculum incorporates the Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS), Family-Centered Practice, and County Conferences conducted by the Foster Care Reviewers. The Intensive Training curriculum is continuously being updated to reflect state and federal mandates, agency policy and practice changes.

On the job training is provided to the new Family Protection Specialists/Workers in addition to the four weeks of Intensive Training to include targeted training on practice and policy, assessment of the family's strengths, and risk to the child, which include the use of the Family-Centered Practice tools, case planning in all cases, and working with sexually abused children and their families. On-the-job training lasts for four weeks, and alternates with the four weeks of Intensive Training. The Intensive Family Protection Specialist/Worker training is currently being taught every other week. The Training Program is able to graduate 18 Family Protection Specialists/Workers in eight weeks.

Training Program Staff have been involved in the "Casework Supervision Learning Labs," being provided by a grant through the Children's Bureau through the University of Kentucky. This training has been given to the Area Social Work Supervisors and Regional Directors in Regions I-West and I-East. Preliminary work has begun to provide this training to Area Social Work Supervisors and Regional Directors statewide. Previous training was conducted by a former DFCS employee/trainer, Kim Shackelford. Ms. Shackelford facilitated the training in her role as Assistant Professor at the University.

The Training Program continues to be involved in assisting all DFCS staff state-wide in the on-going use of the Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS).

The Training Program staff continues to provide financial and clerical training and assistance to Area Social Work Supervisors concerning the MACWIS bookkeeping system. Plans are underway to revamp the clerical training for county bookkeepers and reestablish a training program designed for clerical staff.

The Training Program continues to assist with the Mississippi's Permanency Partnership Network Annual Conference. Each year this conference provides training on the most current information to direct service workers regarding innovative programs and services, and to further promote and encourage the growth of the statewide community-based network. The goal of the conference is to maintain a constant illustration of community partnerships through the examples provided by the workshop presenters and to provide information needed to successfully guide the children in our lives.

Safety in the field is increasingly an important issue for workers. The Training Program is responsible for overseeing the Worker Safety Committee. The Worker Safety Committee is planning for the Fourth Annual *Social Worker Safety Awareness Month* to be held in July 2006. In prior years, the DFCS staff celebrated Social Worker Safety Awareness Month each July by holding a kick-off campaign at the State Office Building in Jackson.

Recruitment and retention of workers for the DFCS continues to be an issue. The Training Program is involved in various activities and efforts to recruit new workers

and to provide community awareness about the programs and services provided through MDHS. The Training Program participates in Career Fairs sponsored by the State Universities, Community Colleges and the Governor's Job Fairs. The Training Program staff hosts a display booth where they distribute brochures pertaining to the Division's employment. These displays are also exhibited at various conferences in and out of state.

The Training Program has been involved in the planning of the Southern Christian Services' Annual *"Lookin' to the Future"* Conference. Approximately 30 of our foster teens attend this conference annually, along with foster parents licensed through the Agency, and Family Protection Specialists/Workers from all area agencies.

The Training Program has been involved in the planning of various workshops and conferences that allow continuing education units (CEUs) to be awarded by the program. The Training Program has been approved as a designated provider of Social Work Units through the Mississippi Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

Training Staff was involved in the development of the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) by participating in focus groups, addressing safety, well-being, permanency, and several systemic factors.

The Training Program continues to develop a "library" of items that are relevant to field staff on a daily basis. These items include video tapes, brochures, articles, books and computer resources about various subjects such as family group conference, strength based assessment, child development, sexually transmitted diseases, various medical conditions, and the special needs of foster children, behavioral management techniques, adolescent issues, and numerous other issues relevant to the field staff confronting workers on a daily basis.

Staff has been involved in various speaking engagements related to child and/or vulnerable adult abuse and neglect. These include speaking to various schools, day care programs, Head Start Programs, hospice programs, retirement centers, medical centers, and health departments.

Training Staff participate on advisory committees such as the Child Fatality Review Board, the Director's Advisory Committee on Permanency Planning, and Strategies to Assist Independent Living Skills (S.A.I.L.S).

Special assistance is provided to the MACWIS Unit and other units within the division to ensure continuity of training for staff by Training Staff.

Tribal Consultation

Provide an update of the specific measures taken by the State in the past year to improve or maintain compliance with each of the five major requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). The five major requirements are:

- Identification of Indian children by the State child welfare services agency;
- Notification of Indian parents and tribes of State proceedings involving Indian children and their right to intervene;
- Special placement preferences for placement of Indian children;
- Active efforts to prevent the breakup of the Indian family;
- Use of Tribal courts in child welfare matters, tribal right to intervene in State proceedings, or transfer proceedings to the jurisdiction of the Tribe.

The specific measures taken by the State in the past year to improve or maintain compliance with each of the five major requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) include:

- A Policy Bulletin was developed and distributed to address the issue of identification of Indian children by the State child welfare services agency.
 - Effective August 17, 2005, staff were required to adhere to the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in identifying persons with Native American heritage by asking the following questions:
 - Is parent or child of Native American heritage?
 - Is parent eligible for tribal membership?
 - Is parent registered with Native American tribe?
 - Is child eligible for tribal membership?
 - Has child been registered with Native American tribe?
 - Does the family live on tribal land?

In April 2005, to better determine compliance with ICWA, the Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS) was revised to include a separate ICWA case narrative contact type. By August 2006, a MACWIS Report will be developed to report on ICWA and Native American Race data, including the percentage of open cases with ICWA contact and the number of families with Native American heritage. The planned revision of the State's ICWA policy is scheduled to be completed by December 2006.

Training on ICWA continues to be included in the Intensive Training curriculum that is required for all new DFCS Family Protection Specialists/Workers. Revisions to and updating of the Intensive Training curricula is scheduled to be completed by March 2007. In addition, the State is in the process of trying to improve collaboration with the Mississippi Band of Choctaws' Social Services in coordinating protective service cases related to children of Choctaw families who are not covered or eligible for services through the Mississippi Band of Choctaws or their Social Services. A written interagency agreement and periodic review process will be developed to deal with this issue by January 2007 and May 2007 respectively.

CAPTA State Grant

In compliance with CAPTA, programs implemented through CBCAP, CJA, and Child Abuse and Neglect State Basic CBCAP grants, DFCS has focused on the continued coordination and collaboration to develop a Statewide Network of community-based child abuse prevention activities and family resource services. Mississippi's Permanency Partnership Network (MPPN) is the key component and the model for the statewide network of community-based, prevention-focused, family support services. The MPPN includes community-based partners working collectively to assess available resources and maximize the resources provided through grants allocated under CAPTA.

- **Children's Justice Act (CJA) Grant** funds two (2) grants to improve the handling of child abuse cases in the court system and reduce the trauma to children involved in these cases. These grants are accomplishing this mission by expanding Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse Review Teams (MDT) into each of the twenty-two (22) judicial districts to create a statewide system. Currently, the Statewide Network of MDT is located in 95% of Mississippi's eighty-four (84) counties. By FFY 2007, the goal of the Children's Justice Act Task Forces is to have review teams in all eighty-four (84) Mississippi Counties. CJA funded training focuses on forensic interviewing skills development to further the provision of specialized training in child abuse investigation. This training is offered to MDHS staff and law enforcement investigators serving on teams.
- **Community Based Child Abuse and Prevention Grant** provides respite services through two (2) providers. These services include respite for pre-school children in a school setting, domestic crisis care respite, and in-home respite care for children with disabilities, chronic or terminal illness or who are at-risk of family violence, neglect, or abuse.
- **The State Basic Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Grant** funds three (3) grants that provide programs that focus on prevention services to high risk families as well as the areas of respite care and supervised visitation. These grantees offer various programs and services such as respite services to children of single parents, resource referrals, parent education, one on one case management, home based instruction, supervised visitation, COPEs, parent aides, teen parent support, support groups, community education, and counseling.

Chafee Independent Living Services**Assist youth in transitioning from dependency to self-sufficiency:**

The Independent Living Program (ILP) helps adolescents acquire basic life skills in their progress from dependency toward self-sufficiency. Youth are eligible for Independent Living Services based on the following criteria:

- Youth in care, ages 14 until their 21st birthday, are eligible for all Independent Living Services except for criteria placed on the Educational and Training Voucher program;

- Youth who leave custody, ages 18 to their 21st birthday, are eligible for Aftercare services until their 21st birthday;
- Youth who enroll in post-secondary educational and vocational programs may be eligible based on the criteria detailed in the **Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) Program** section

All youth must have the opportunity to participate in independent living preparations, without regard to the youth's permanent plan. Refusal by the youth to participate is not a valid reason for non-participation. Independent Living Services are mandatory and not optional for all youth in care who are at least 14 years old or less than 21 years old. All youth in care are eligible and appropriate to receive Independent Living Services, based on the child's best interest. Some services are provided through a contractual agreement to include Life Skills Training, Retreats, Youth Conferences, and other services deemed appropriate. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian Tribe youth are eligible for Independent Living Services based on the same criteria for MDHS youth in care.

Mississippi contracts the Independent Living and After-Care Services to a contractor whose emphasis on self-sufficiency is top priority. The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) utilizes a contracting agency known as Southern Christian Services Inc., which is known as Providing Resources, Education and Preparation to Adolescents Reaching Emancipation (PREPARE). The contract provides statewide Independent Living and After-Care Services to youth, 14 to 21 years of age, who are in the foster care system and to those who transition out of the foster care system. The contractor provides sufficient staff to meet the needs of an anticipated 980 eligible youth. The program employs one Program Director, two Senior Independent Living Specialists, seven Independent Living Specialists, and one After-Care Specialist. The staff are strategically located throughout the State and assigned to each MDHS/DFCS region.

The Independent Living Specialists employed by the contractor conduct Independent Living Skills Groups which cover various topics for achieving self-sufficiency. These topics provide skills training, which is a nationally recognized, Ansell-Casey Life Skills curriculum approved by DFCS, to participating youth based on assessments, personal contact, the Independent Living Plan Study, and the Transitional Living Plan Study. The curriculum now contains eight modules. The titles of the modules are: Community Resources and Transportation, Communication Skills and Social Development, Employment, Money Management, Decision Making and Study Skills, Housing, Daily Living Skills, and Self-Care. These modules address the five (5) areas of development identified by the Youth Development and Youth Leadership in Programs Organization. The five areas identified are Working, Learning, Thriving, Connecting, and Leading. An additional module titled Youth Law Issues will be added during the contract period. Knowledge of the youth will be measured by the utilization of a pre-test at the beginning of each curriculum module. A component review (post-test) instrument will measure learning at the completion of each module. The results of the post-test will be compared to the pre-test given at the

beginning of each curriculum component. The DFCS ILP has recognized key principles for youth to make a more positive transition to adulthood. They are: Positive Youth Development, Collaboration, Cultural Competence, and Permanent Connections.

All youth, ages 14 to 21, are required to attend bi-monthly Living Skills Groups which focus on soft and hard skills. The groups are coordinated by the Regional Independent Living Specialists. Adolescents participating in the program under this section will also be participating directly in providing recommendations and designing their own program activities that prepare them for independent living. In addition, the adolescents are required to accept personal responsibility for living up to their part of the program. Efforts are being made to increase the number of youth participating in an active role to establish a more enhanced Youth Advisory Board. Though youth representation has been very strong in certain training events and various youth activities, there is a need to identify an increased amount of youth leaders to facilitate a Youth Advisory Board in order to provide the State with input and guidance on policy and programming.

Progress reports of skills sessions are completed at the end of each of the eight curriculum modules by the Regional Independent Living Specialist and sent to the youth's Family Protection Specialist/Worker in the county of responsibility. Upon attaining 20 skills hours, a request is sent to the youth's Family Protection Specialist/Worker in the county of responsibility to be put in the State's Automated System (MACWIS) for the \$30.00 Skills Hours Stipend. This is done in hope of increasing the number of youth who participate with additional incentives.

The following is a list of some of activities provided during the period of October 1, 2004, through September 30, 2005:

Living Skills Group Sessions	1,143
Participants	823
Independent Living Retreats	9
Participants	185
Teen Conferences	2
Southern Teen Conference (June 8-10, 2005)	73
participants	<u>71</u>
Northern Teen Conference (July 13-15, 2005)	144
participants	

Stipends are provided to the eligible youth as rewards for important life accomplishments. These stipends are provided for: College stipend, Newsletter Submission, Accumulation of 20 Skills Group Hours, Start-up, Senior Year Expenses, After-Care Follow-up Survey, Graduation/GED, Aftercare Room and Board and Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV).

Help youth receive the education, training and services necessary to obtain employment:

In August of 2005, DFCS held our first Computer Training Camp through a contract with Instructional Access, Inc. The Computer Training Camp was held August 8-10, 2005, in Jackson, Mississippi, and provided training with state of the art equipment to enhance the skills of those foster care youth and those who qualified for the ETV Program. There were 36 youth participants for the Computer Camp Training. In addition to the newly funded ETV Program covering post-secondary educational needs and vocational programs, Mississippi provides the upgraded stipend amounts to assist our youth as they transition towards self-sufficiency. As outlined in our last policy revisions in 2003, the upgraded stipend amounts have not yet been issued. The roll out of the upgraded stipend amounts will be introduced to field staff in the form of a bulletin effective for October 2005. The following stipends will be upgraded and/or added to assist with financial needs and encouragement to continue with their educational efforts which will prepare them for better employment opportunities and better salaries.

College Bound Stipend: \$600. This stipend is being made available to youth enrolled in college, living on or off campus. This stipend can be used to furnish the dorm room or place of residence, purchase books/resource material, computer, or other needed items not covered by other funding, excluding clothing. In the past, this stipend was limited only to those youth who stayed on the college campus in the dormitory. However, past experiences have taught us that by limiting this stipend only to those who stay in the college dormitory may construct a barrier for some youth who are very much involved in the ILP and are attending college or vocational programs. During FY 2006, there were 27 youth who received a College Bound Stipend.

Community/College Graduation Stipend: \$200. This is a new stipend category which will be offered as a reward to all ILP participants for completing a two-year community college program and/or receiving a degree from a four-year college or university, or full completion of a vocational program. We will be providing our next set of statistics of the number of stipends awarded after the 2005 - 2006 school year.

Start-Up Stipend: \$1,000. This stipend is an emancipation stipend to be used for purchases associated with the establishing of a home or place of residence. This stipend cannot be used for room and board expenses, utility deposits/utilities nor the purchase or maintenance of a car. During FY 2006, 72 youth received the Independent Living Start-Up Stipend.

Foster Teen Trainer Stipend: From September 2003 to July 2004, three foster teens assisted in the actual training of the Interdependent Living Training Curriculum to MDHS/DFCS Staff. This was an introduction of efforts to continue to involve youth with training events. The Five Year Plan includes efforts to continue to include foster youth and have them assist with various training activities.

Destination Future Stipend: The National Youth Leadership Conference "Destination Future 2005" was held Friday, August 26 through Sunday, August 28, 2005, in Glorieta, New Mexico. In attendance were nine (9) foster teens, along with three (3) adults. The adults were the Independent Living Coordinator and two (2) Foster/Adopt parents from Mississippi. Our teens joined other youth in custody from around the nation. The conference agenda included expert adults and other foster youth to assist in expanding their knowledge of various independent and transitional living information and programs. The conference included a wide range of topics including one entitled "Leading the Way." This particular workshop focused on leadership styles and enhancing leadership skills. It provided tips and techniques for developing goals and strengthening positive habits of living independently. The workshop allowed the youth to actively role play in scenarios to put into practice various styles of leadership.

After-Care Survey Stipend: An After-Care Survey Stipend has been established for the youth as an incentive for them to complete and return the survey to SCSCY for follow-up services. During FY 2006, 11 youth received the Aftercare Survey Stipend. During October 1, 2004 through September 30, 2005, the Division incurred the following expenditures in the aforementioned areas:

SUPPORT SERVICES/STIPENDS	NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS	AMOUNT
Aftercare Survey	11	\$ 195.00
Aftercare Stipend	1	\$ 703.98
College Bound	15	\$ 8,000.00
Senior Year	23	\$ 5,075.76
Start-up	47	\$ 41,359.08
Teen Conference Allowance	163	\$ 4,920.00
Teen Conference Clothing	146	\$ 29,200.00
20 Skills Hour	143	\$ 5,040.00
ETV Voucher (Federal & State)	43	\$ 121,892.00
Destination Future	9	\$1,800.00

Provide personal and emotional support to youth through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults:

Youth in care are provided personal and emotional support through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults. There is certain criteria the county of responsibility Family Protection Specialist/Worker needs to ensure before a youth is released from care. This includes: the youth has a safe place to live whether with others or alone; the youth has a means of supporting himself/herself after release; the youth has been notified in writing at least one month in advance that emancipation will be sought; and the youth has a mentor and/or resource family. The social worker identifies individual and/or family and then documents the information through the individual case plan. In addition to the mandates of the county staff, the PREPARE Program provides a pool of nine mentors for the ILP during their current contract period.

In an attempt to continue to increase our pool of mentors statewide, the current contract has been renewed with the current provider (PREPARE). One of the scopes of services with the current contractor for 2005 is to recruit and establish a minimum of eighteen mentors per contract year. The Big Brothers/Big Sisters program is another group that assists with recruitment of possible mentors and role models. The State Independent Coordinator and the current contract provider met with the agency that hosts the Big Brother/Big Sister program for the State of Mississippi, which is affiliated with the national Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. Efforts are on-going to implement assistance from the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development (NCWRCYD) to explore other mentoring programs and transitional living plans. Social Workers, ASWS, and Independent Living Specialists will coordinate with NCWRCYD and community resource agencies to ensure all applicable services are available and obtainable to assist youth in attaining and maintaining independence after release from agency custody.

Efforts continue to provide "job shadowing" opportunities in the work force through cooperative agreements with employers. Various marketing attempts are solicited through the NCWRCYD, Strategies for Assessing Independent Living Services (SAILS) Advisory Board, and the contract provider, to best evaluate how this can be implemented. Our youth, 17 years of age and older, will be provided this opportunity. Social Workers, ASWSs, Independent Living Specialists and the youth will be responsible for the implementation of the service agreements.

An annual Foster Teen Conference provides personal and emotional support to youth through various interactions with dedicated adults and mentors. The adults are S.A.I.L.S. Advisory Committee Members, MDHS Staff, PREPARE Staff, and the different program presenters, which include former foster youth who have been successful in after-care. During FY 2006, there were two separate Teen Conferences held. The Southern Teen Conference was held June 8-10, 2005, on the campus of Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. A total of 94 youth and staff were in attendance. The Northern Teen Conference was held on July 13-15, 2005, on the campus of Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi. A total of 98 youth and staff were in attendance.

There is a Transitional Independent Living Plan component in MACWIS. This component captures various areas for continued assessment of the Independent Living Plan and the Transitional Living Plan. The Independent Living coordinator continues to get assistance by the NCWRCYD to recognize barriers of the plan. Now that we have provisions for After-Care Services, effective October 1, 2004, youth who leave the foster care system will no longer have access to Independent Living Skills Groups, Stipends, Retreats, Foster Teen Conferences, or Youth Track. These services were being extended for up to six months after release from care in an effort to get youth to be more self-sufficient. An contract After-Care Independent Living Specialist is responsible for developing a functioning After-Care program that provides an accurate account of the number of youth eligible for emancipation, the

number of youth that have completed pre-exit interviews, exit interviews, and post-exit interviews where possible, the number that have left custody, the number of surveys mailed, the number returned, and documentation of where they are residing, working, in school, incarcerated, and etc. At the Teen Conferences, a Career Fair was set up with educational resources, employment resources, and various other services available to them.

The PREPARE Resource Library contains numerous books, curriculums, periodicals, and videos relevant to the needs and issues of older youths. This is available and will be utilized when contact is made by former foster youth. A toll free (1-800) number is available for youth to contact SCSCY staff when after-care services are needed or they can go to the MDHS/DFCS Office in the county where they reside. The county social worker will research the MACWIS system to verify that the youth was once in care and if they are within the eligibility period for the services requested. The After-care Specialist and/or Independent Living Specialists will do a discharge interview with each youth when the youth is approximately 16.5 years of age but prior to their 17th birthday. A follow-up discharge interview will be done at 18 years of age and every 6 months thereafter until emancipation. The After-care Independent Living Specialist employed by the contractor for the ILP will conduct tracking efforts of the youth leaving care.

Information gathered from the Transitional Living Plan by the county of responsibility worker will provide initial information of where the youth is planning to go after custody is released. An After-care survey will be given to the youth. A \$25 stipend for returning the survey has been established to provide added incentives. Currently there are three participants in the Independent Living Apartment program. The ETV Program will also provide additional support services to youth who are enrolled in the program prior to turning 21 to be eligible until age 23. A further description of this service program is explained in the ETV Program section.

During the FY 2006 year, there were nine recipients of the Independent Living Room and Board stipend. Though efforts continue to be implemented to maximize 30 percent of program funds to provide room and board for youth, ages 18 to 21, the planned use of an amount of up to 30 percent was not fulfilled.

The ILP makes efforts to coordinate the State programs receiving funds provided from an allotment made to the State under subsection (c) with other Federal and State programs for youth (especially transitional living youth projects funded under part B of Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974), abstinence education programs, local housing programs, and programs for disabled youth. The Southern and Northern Teen Conferences included programs that discussed topics such as Abstinence, Youth and the Law, and various other topical areas. Other areas for coordination are Project Homestead and the County Task Force Teams. Efforts continue to take place to include IL Specialist to attend various meetings and coordinate with the PREPARE Program Coordinator.

We continue to coordinate our Independent Living services with Federal and State programs to maximize benefits for our foster youth. Representatives from each of the organizations listed above have been invited to take part in our focus group meetings and provide input on plans being made with and for youth who are transitioning out of care. We are requesting assistance of the NCWRCYD to help us in our efforts to obtain a service agreement with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to give priority with housing for youth exiting the foster care system. MDHS staff, foster/adoptive parents, and the foster youth continue to attend workshops, conferences, and other functions provided by the MDHS Abstinence program and those sponsored by contracted agencies. The Foster Teen Conference included sessions with the Becoming A Responsible Team (BART). This group provides workshops on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), Abstinence, and the "Just Say No to Sex" rule. We have used MDHS Abstinence program staff to speak on the opening night of the Foster Teen Conference. The Independent Living Specialists provide skills groups to a variety of foster youth, included disabled youth, who are placed in various types of settings.

Activities planned to enhance services collaborating include a number of approaches. Coordinating efforts include SCSCY programs and various other relevant programs, such as Big Brother/Big Sister, Court Appointed Special Advocacy (CASA), and current youth skills groups for the youth. Efforts continue in exploring the Department of Labor's Shared Vision for Youth.

In addition to the contracting agency, the CFCIP has structured the Strategies for Assessing Independent Living Skills (S.A.I.L.S.) Advisory Board and is made up of the State Independent Living Coordinator, two MDHS Staff members from each of the nine Regions in the State, the PREPARE Program Director, Mississippi Band of Choctaw representatives, and youth in care teen leaders. Efforts continue to ensure youth are represented at the S.A.I.L.S. meetings. Adolescents participating in the program under this section participate directly by providing recommendations and designing their own program activities to prepare them for independent living. In addition, the adolescents are required to accept personal responsibility for their part of the program.

The ILP in conjunction with the DFCS Training Program has incorporated the Interdependent Living Training curriculum into the DFCS Intensive Training curriculum offered to agency staff. This is an intensive four week training that is held throughout the year. The foster and adoptive parent training is also held during the year and incorporates information that addresses adolescent issues. This training curriculum is provided to all foster and adoptive parent training classes conducted statewide. This training is designed to help foster parents, adoptive parents, group home staff, and case workers better understand issues confronting adolescents that are trying to achieve self-sufficiency.

The S.A.I.L.S. Advisory Board, PREPARE program, and selected foster parents attended the 2005 "*Lookin' to the Future*" Conference. The conference hosted

representatives from the NCWRCYD who conducted an intensive three day training of various youth topics such as Positive Youth Development, Creative Life Skills Training, and Working Together for Successful Youth Transition. This continued the adapted effort to educate the four principles the DFCS ILP program has recognized as crucial in the transition to adulthood process: Positive Youth Development, Collaboration, Cultural Competence, and Permanent Connections.

Collaboration with the NCWRCYD has been established and efforts continue to assess areas in need of further training topics. The Interdependent Living Training curriculum has been incorporated into the Intensive Training curriculum which conducts training sessions through out the year. To date, there is no specific training date scheduled for upcoming training events. The dates are on a "to be announced" arrangement. Plans have been discussed for the Independent Living Coordinator to be included in the DFCS regional meetings to incorporate training on the Independent Living Plan, with an emphasis on the ETV program.

The DFCS ILP has opted not to partake in the service design and delivery of the trust fund program. To date, the DFCS ILP does not have a Trust Fund process set up for eligible youth leaving care. Youth are eligible for numerous stipends, including a \$1,000 Start-up Stipend upon being emancipated or leaving States custody.

The DFCS IL program continues to make efforts to increase youth involvement with agency efforts with regards to the CFSR and PIP process. One area is through the youth advisory board named Helping Ourselves Prosper Equally (HOPE) Forum.

HOPE Forum is a youth advisory group consisting of members who are participating in the Independent Living Program. Meetings are held quarterly for the youth to discuss improvements or challenges with the Independent Living Program. Though this area has been challenging to capitalize on, efforts continue to review the best way to structure this board. Plans are in place to seek further information to improve this process, such as allowing youth to express ideas and concerns through different lines of communication, like HOPE forum. One area that is utilized is the Life Skills Groups. When youth attend their skills groups, they are able to network with other youth and also the IL Specialist during this time. The information is then forwarded to the PREPARE Director to share with the State IL Coordinator to include with efforts to assess the overall functionality of the program. The S.A.I.L.S. Advisory Board continues to meet regularly and plans to continue holding monthly to quarterly meetings in the continuation of assessing the IL program. In the past, youth have attended some of the meetings and efforts will continue to increase the number of youth attending the S.A.I.L.S. meeting.

Other lines of communication include the monthly retreats held throughout the year and the yearly conferences held during the summer months. The retreats and conferences allow an opportunity for youth to come together and attend the scheduled sessions, but also, time is scheduled for the HOPE Forum. This allows youth to continue to express their views of the IL program. These views are notated and used

to enhance the program. The plan is to continue to have more youth involvement in the CFSR and PIP process.

Foster youth who leave custody in Mississippi on or after their 18th birthday but who have not yet reached age 21, under certain criteria, are granted Medicaid coverage through the month in which they become 21 years of age without regard to their income or resources. Foster youth may receive this coverage if they were in a licensed placement prior to leaving care. This continued coverage has been in effect since July 1, 2001. The coverage of foster youth who leave foster care continues to be implemented by the Division of Medicaid (DOM) as follows: when MDHS sends a Medicaid end date on a foster youth who is age 18 or greater, but less than age 21, the DOM bypasses the end date and locks the individual into continuous Medicaid coverage to age 21; the youth is issued a letter from DOM that specifies continuous coverage to age 21; the notice/letter is sent to the county MDHS office address and the social worker ensures that the foster youth receives the notice.

They are informed of the continued coverage so they can fully benefit from this After-care service. The plastic Medicaid ID card issued to the youth while in care remains active for use. The county social worker must make sure that the Medicaid card is given to the youth upon release from custody. Medicaid eligibility will continue for the youth until age 21 unless the DOM is notified of the need to end eligibility earlier due to a move out of State, death of the individual, or a long-term admission to a public institution. The notification of any of these terminating events is the responsibility of the county social worker or other MDHS designee.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is the recognized Indian Tribe in the State of Mississippi. Choctaw youth are eligible for Independent Living Services based on the same criteria for MDHS youth in care. Two members from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians were in attendance at the meetings during FY 2006, and a representative from the Choctaw Tribe participated in the S.A.I.L.S. Advisory Board. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians was invited to attend the annual teen conferences, teen retreats, and the 2005 "*Lookin' to the Future*" Conference, held in Natchez, Mississippi.

The NCWRCYD provided technical assistance for the ILP and many areas were identified for growth of the program. The consultation was documented and implemented toward the development of the CFSP. The ILP incorporates areas that ensure eligibility determination for benefits and services, which includes fair and equitable treatment for Indian youth that are identified in the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

Under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, P.L. No. 106-169, signed by the President on December 14, 1999, States were given the option to extend Medicaid coverage to youth ages 18 to 21, who were in foster care on their 18th birthday. The criteria and procedures apply only to youth who are receiving foster care IV-E or Child Welfare Services (CWS) Medicaid at the time they leave

MDHS/DFCS custody on or after their 18th birthday. Foster youth who receive Medicaid or Health benefits under other categories such as SSI, TANF, Economic Assistance, CHIPS, and Regional Medicaid will not be in the category for the automatic continuous Medicaid coverage up to age 21. Those individual programs will have to determine eligibility for continued coverage. The main criterion for determining eligibility is to make certain the youth identified meet the requirements described by the CFCIP.

MDHS/DFCS does not discriminate on the basis of race, age, sex, religion or national origin. All benefits will be equally distributed across the board solely based upon the age of the youth and by custody of MDHS/DFCS or the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Eligible recipients must be participating in the ILP activities and have an Independent Living and /or Transitional Living Plan that has been developed based upon input by the youth. Monthly reports are generated through MACWIS and are provided to the Independent Living Specialists as their case loads. The Foster Care Review Unit reviews all Individual Service Plans (ISP) every six months and alerts the Placement Unit if no documentation of Independent Living services is being provided. The names of those youth identified are referred to the Independent Living Specialists for Independent Living services.

MDHS has established the Program Integrity Unit, which conducts periodic evaluations of programs. The ILP along with the Program Integrity Unit will enforce standards and procedures to prevent fraud and abuse in the programs carried out under the plan.

Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)

The ETV Program, enacted in 2001, provides Mississippi with supplemental resources to meet the educational and training needs of youth aging out of foster care including post-secondary educational and vocational programs. This program makes vouchers of up to \$5,000 per year available to eligible youth attending institutions of higher education. This includes youth who have left foster care because they attained 18 years of age but have not yet attained 21 years of age; youth likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age, commensurate with the State criteria used to determine eligibility for the program; and former foster care recipients, age 21 and younger. Students participating in the voucher program at age 21 and making satisfactory progress toward completing their course of study or training may continue up to age 23. Mississippi will provide vouchers to youth who are adopted from foster care after age 16 but have not yet reached 21 years of age. The State will comply with the Program Instructions that explain the CFCIP and ETV Programs by the implementation of the plan. Various description of methods have been described to ensure that the total amount of educational assistance to a youth under this program and any other Federal assistance program does not exceed the total cost of attendance. It will strive to ensure and avoid any duplication of benefits under this and any other Federal assistance program.

During our first year of implementation of the Chafee Educational and ETV Program, there were several barriers that resulted in Mississippi not utilizing the Federally allocated funds. The following barriers were identified:

- Time required of social workers in completing the process, and not enough workers
- Application and approval process is cumbersome
- Ineffective marketing of the ETV program

To maximize these funds for our youth, we enlisted technical assistance from the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development. To improve the use of ETV funds, the technical assistance will target the following areas:

- Strategies to more effectively administer the State's ETV funds
- Clarification of "allowable expenses" as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965
- Mississippi ETV application, approval, and award process

The following strategies were implemented:

- Enlisted SCSCY services to assist youth with the application process to decrease the time required of DFCS social workers
- Eliminate unnecessary steps in the ETV application approval and award allocation process
- Provided information on the ETV program to all interested parties including youth in care, foster and adoptive parents, group homes, residential facilities, mentors, stakeholders, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions

The State Independent Living Coordinator attended various meetings to market the ETV Program in which youth were present and had the opportunity to discuss the ETV procedures and application process. The board meeting with the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) included representatives from the courts, Attorney General's Office, and other various helping professions. Various questions were asked and responded to of the possibilities of using ETV funds.

Mississippi's plan is to continue to use the assistance of SCSCY, along with agency staff to assist in identifying youth who are eligible for the ETV funds. The services of the PREPARE Independent Living Specialists to assist eligible youth with the ETV application process have been included in the Scope of Services. The plan for the new ETV approval process was shared with the DFCS Director, the nine Regional Directors, and all State Office Unit Directors. The State Independent Living Coordinator provided an in-service training, question and answer session on the revised ETV process with the PREPARE Program Director, the two Senior IL Specialists, the seven IL Specialists, and the IL After-Care Specialist. The revised ETV Process has been well received by all.

The revised ETV approval process is as follows:

- Independent Living (IL) Specialists (Contractor) will assist in identifying eligible youth;